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Forest Service  
Pacific Northwest Region

# Understanding Sexual Harassment

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## What Is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is deliberate or repeated unsolicited sexual advances such as verbal comments, gestures, looks, or physical contacts which are *unwelcome* and *unwanted*.

Sexual harassment is a violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and a prohibited personnel practice.

Unwelcome sexual advances could be identified as sexual harassment when:

- Submission is a condition of employment, either explicitly or implicitly.
- The employee's job is affected.
- The advances interfere with work performance or create an atmosphere of intimidation or hostility.
- Submission is a condition for training opportunities, promotion, satisfactory performance evaluation, recommendation for applications to other positions, etc.

The individual (victim) decides if the sexual attention of the antagonist is offensive. What is funny or permissible to one person may be offensive to another. *Unwanted* sexual attention on the job is what is being addressed. It is not the intent of the Forest Service to regulate *mutual* social interaction or relationships freely entered into by Federal employees.

## What is the Forest Service Sexual Harassment Policy?

Sexual harassment is a form of employee misconduct which undermines the integrity of the employment relationship. All employees must be allowed to work in an environment free from unsolicited and unwelcome sexual overtures. **Sexual harassment is unacceptable conduct in the workplace and will not be condoned by Forest Service management.** Pacific Northwest Region employees involved in the sexual harassment of co-workers and/or subordinates will be subject to disciplinary action.

With respect to conduct between employees, (whether between co-workers, supervisors and subordinate, or any other combination) an employer can be held responsible for acts of sexual harassment in the workplace. This occurs where the employing organization, its agents or supervising employees, knows or should have known of the conduct, unless it can show *immediate* and *appropriate* corrective action was taken.

## What Can I Do If I Am a Victim of Sexual Harassment?

- Recognize it early.
- Don't assume it's your fault or that if you ignore it it will go away.
- Respond immediately with "Please don't do that."
- If it persists, you may wish to ask someone to stand with you while you ask that it be stopped.

If sexual harassment continues:

- Make a request to the antagonist, in writing, that harassment cease. Keep a copy.
- Document incidents. You may wish to get statements from witnesses.
- Contact your supervisor, or if your supervisor is the antagonist go to the next level of supervision.
- If the harassment situation is not immediately acted upon you may contact an EEO Counselor, your Personnel Officer or your Union representative.

## **What Is The Supervisor's Responsibility?**

Complaints of harassment must be examined impartially and resolved promptly.

Prevention is the best tool for elimination of sexual harassment. A supervisor should take all necessary steps to prevent sexual harassment, such as:

- Being aware, not ignoring reported incidents of sexual harassment.
- Trying not to create or develop defensiveness, guilt or further resentment regarding the victim.
- Explaining what sexual harassment is.
- Expressing strong disapproval.
- Developing appropriate corrective procedures.
- Providing a prompt follow-up to the person lodging the complaint.
- Informing employees of their rights to raise and how to raise the issue of harassment under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.
- Protecting the confidentiality of both the accuser and the accused.

## What Actions Could Be Taken Against Employees Violating the Forest Service Sexual Harassment Policy?

An employee who violates the Forest Service sexual harassment policy could be:

- Reprimanded orally and/or in writing.
- Suspended without pay.
- Transferred or reassigned.
- Taken to court.
- Terminated from Government service.



